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C O N F I D E N T I A L BELGRADE 001288

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [KV](#) [SR](#)  
SUBJECT: SERBIA: ALL QUIET ON KUMANOVO FOR NOW

REF: BELGRADE 1231

Classified By: Bradford Bell, Deputy Political Chief; reasons 1.4 (b, d).

Summary

1. (C) Serbian government officials have ceased public discussion about reopening talks with NATO on the Kumanovo agreement (reftel). The silence is welcome, following last week's persistent pronouncements that Serbia wanted to reopen the June 1999 agreement, which was concluded at the end of hostilities in Kosovo and provided for the withdrawal of Serbian forces from Kosovo and established a demilitarized buffer zone along Kosovo's administrative boundary line. Serbia still wants to reopen the agreement, but is now willing to await - for the time being - a political signal from NATO when the timing is right. End Summary.

General Ponos: Talks Will Wait

2. (C) Serbian leaders and media were quiet this week on the Government's interest in reopening the Kumanovo Military Technical Agreement (MTA). The silence came after NATO country representatives informed the Serbs that the timing was inappropriate. Despite any new public discussion, Serbian leaders are still interested in reviewing this issue in the medium term and will likely submit its request through NATO political channels. Chief of Staff General Ponos told us on December 5 that various NATO officials had informed him that the Kumanovo agreement could only be changed through formal political channels and with the NAC's blessing. He said he had agreed to work with NATO in early 2009 to see what could be done behind the scenes and at a technical working level until there was political consensus in the NAC to address this. He said he was frustrated by an obvious lack of communication and understanding between NATO, its allies, and Serbia. Assistant Minister for NATO and Security Issues at the MFA, Zoran Vujic, told us on December 5 that after discussing with Ponos they had agreed that both the military and the MFA would remain silent on this issue, hoping for better conditions next year.  
Ponos: Kumanovo Should Be Gone

3. (C) Ponos said that rather than renegotiating the MTA, he would prefer to see it disappear. This was a basic Serbian sovereignty issue, he said, noting that Serbia had complied fully with the agreement in the past. After nearly ten years, the situation now was much better between Serbia and NATO, and the agreement should reflect that, he said. Ponos said he wanted the five kilometer land security zone abolished. He also wanted to remove restrictions on aircraft in the region. Ponos reassured us that he did not want to put troops in the area or conduct exercises in the region.

Comment

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14. (C) Serbian leaders have gotten our message that discussion on Kumanovo is not now appropriate for public discourse, given other outstanding security issues. Their silence this week suggests they will be quiet, at least temporarily. We can expect, however, that this issue will again raise its head in 2009, particularly if Serbian officials believe they have fulfilled their commitment to providing a stable and calm atmosphere in Kosovo. In return, they will look for goodwill from NATO allies on revising Kumanovo. End Comment.  
MUNTER